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Belarus: Treatment of opposition party members since the election of President Alexandr Lukashenko (March 2006 - February 2007)

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In the March 2006 presidential elections in Belarus, President Aleksandr Lukashenko was re-elected with 82.6 percent of the vote and extended his term in office for a third five-year term (BBC 24 Mar. 2006; Global Insight 20 Mar. 2006). Of the main opposition candidates, Aleksandr Milinkevich, leader of the United Citizen Party, received 6 percent of the votes, Sergei Gaidukevich, chairman of the Liberal Democrats, received 3.5 percent and Aleksandr Kozulin, leader of Social Democratic Party, received 2.3 percent (ibid.; European Forum 20 Dec. 2006). Approximately 93 percent of the population turned out to vote (ibid.; Global Insight 20 Mar. 2006).

Media reports indicate that as soon as the election results were known, the opposition candidates disputed them, claiming that "the vote was rigged" (ibid.; BBC 24 Mar. 2006). Furthermore, on 6 April 2006, the European Parliament declared that according to the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the elections "failed to meet international democratic standards" (EU 6 Apr. 2006). The European Parliament also added that "the European Council, the Council of Europe, the United States and most other international institutions and governments also concluded that the elections were "fundamentally flawed" (ibid.).

The European Forum describes Belarus as "an increasingly authoritarian presidential republic, where the president dominates political life and no real opposition is allowed" (European Forum 20 Dec. 2006). According to a not-yet-published report sent to the Research Directorate by a representative of International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF), Belarusian authorities have continued to pressure government adversaries since the elections (20 Feb. 2007, 1; HRW Jan. 2007; AI 23 May 2006). Several sources provide information on various actions carried out by Belarusian government officials against members of opposition parties as follows:

[In December 2006 t]he Belarus opposition leader, Aleksandr Milinkevich, ... , was detained on suspicion of carrying drugs and alcohol. He was stopped by the police in Belozersk, ..., and later was released (Reuters 5 Dec. 2005)

[On 29 November 2006] Border guards and plain-clothes agents at Minsk airport detained [Aleksandr] Milinkevich, ..., claiming that his identity papers "could be false" and confiscating his mobile telephone Milinkevich was returning from the Latvian capital Riga, where [he attended a NATO summit] (AFP 29 Nov. 2006; Reuters 5 Dec. 2005)

[On 21 November 2006] Belarusian Police detained ... [Aleksandr] Milinkevich ... during a visit to a province where he was gathering signatures in support of candidates for local elections (AP 23 Nov. 2006).

[On 1 November 2006] Dzmitry Dashkevich, leader of the "Malady Front" (Youth Front) movement [was] sentenced to 18 months imprisonment ... for activities on behalf of his unregistered organization, ... [he] was held in a cell with patients infected with TB and other contagious diseases (20 Feb. IHF 2007, 9; BelaPAN 8 Nov. 2006).

On 13 July [2006 Aleksandr Kazulin leader of the Belarusian Social-Democratic Party (Hramada)] was sentenced to five-and-a-half years in prison for hooliganism, for organizing activities violating public order, and for disobeying the police (IHF 20 Feb. 2007, 3; OSCE 21 Sept. 2006).

[In May 2006, a] Belarus court ... sentenced Sergei Lyashkevich, an official who helped run the campaign of opposition presidential candidate [Aleksandr] Milinkevich, ... to five months in jail for training and paying people to riot during the protests that ensued after the [2006] March presidential election (University of Pittsburgh 30 May 2006; Dow Jones International News 29 May 2006).

[In April 2006], [[Aleksandr] Milinkevich, former presidential candidate; Aliaksandr Bukhvostau, leader of the Labour Party; Vintsuk Viachorka, leader of the Belarus Popular Front; Siarhei Kalyakin, leader of

the Party of Communists of Belarus; and [Dzmitry] Dashkevich, leader of the Youth Front, were sentenced to 14-15-days imprisonment for organizing and participating in a the rally "Chernobyl Way" on 26 April (IHF 20 Feb. 2007, 6; ITAR-TASS World Service 12 May 2006) .

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Internet sites, including: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), Council on Foreign Relations, European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Montreal Gazette*, *The Moscow Times*, MosNews.Com, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL).

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